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C O N F I D E N T I A L FREETOWN 000042

DEPT FOR AF/W: JHUNTER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/03/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [SL](#)

SUBJECT: SIERRA LEONE ARMY "DREAM TEAM" AIRS GRIEVANCES

REF: EMAIL TO AF/W DESK 2 FEBRUARY

Classified By: DCM Glenn Fedzer for Reason 1.4 (B)

11. (C) Summary: An anonymous letter released in Freetown has accused the Minister of Defense of making appointments and promotions favoring his own ethnic group, corruption and misuse of government resources, and threatens "another war is possible" if the accusations raised in the letter are not addressed. The letter (copy e-mailed to AF/W Feb. 2) caused sufficient concern that the Defense Minister called a special press conference to refute the charges, but there is no evidence that the authors speak for a critical mass of military personnel, or public support exists yet for the soldiers if they take their grievances to the streets. End Summary.

12. (U) An open letter to President Koroma, 'Grievances in the Sierra Leone Army: Another War is Possible' has created a stir within the Ministry of Defense and the Sierra Leonean media, accusing Defense Minister Palor Conteh of corruption and ethnic favoritism. The letter appears to be from a network of over 850 officers and enlisted men who make up the "Detective Reconnaissance Emergency Action Mission" (DREAM) Team, secretly investigating wrong doing within the military. The authors said they chose to remain anonymous, as "if our identity is known our issues of grievance will be lost in hot pursuit of our lives." Note: Embassy has received a copy of the letter, also likely send to other missions. End Note.)

13. (U) Conteh is accused of favoring the Limba ethnic group (of which the President is also a member) with promotions, positions and overseas training opportunities. The letter specifically named some newly appointed/promoted Limba officers, and other Limbas selected for international training. The President's mother was also accused of interfering in military personnel matters. Corruption charges included theft of government resources, unethical sales/procurement deals, the use of soldiers for personal staff, and embezzlement of funds meant for the welfare of the rank and file. The authors further expressed concern about the usurpation of police duties by the RSLAF, including RSLAF replacements for SLP personnel in the presidential guard detail.

14. (U) The letter's tone was threatening, beginning with, "The DREAM Team is committed to checking all forms of injustice and the excessive misrule that led to the bloody rebel war in Sierra Leone" and ending with, "When all fails, please do not be surprised to see us seeking justice in our own way," the group insinuated that violence may lie ahead.

15. (U) The Minister of Defense (MOD) held a special press conference to address the allegations 2 February. He was joined by the Minister of Communications, the Chief of Staff of the Defense Force, and other senior leaders. The MOD refuted each allegation point by point, conceding only that the Presidential Guard had been increased, and dismissing the actions of the elderly mother of the President as an act of "mischief." Journalists, who last month happily grilled Libyan President Qadhafi, seemed reluctant to press the MOD, and accepted the government's line that it was an act of mischief that would fade away.

¶6. (C) Comment: Some of the allegations may have merit, as they appear well documented. The Limbas are not in the majority within the Army and the limited appointments noted by the "Dream Team" would hardly change that, but Conteh's rapid response belies the "just a bit of mischief" message of his presentation at the press conference itself. It appears the tone of the letter touched a nerve by invoking previous military coups throughout Sierra Leone's history, and the MOD response was "urgently dismissive." On the one hand the MOD did not want to appear alarmist, but the speed and breadth of the response indicates that the MOD is very uncomfortable with the sudden airing of the ministry's dirty laundry--and the accompanying hints at military action. While the charges could be credible, the letter may have originated with Conteh's opponents. Conteh's appointment was controversial; he is in his late 40's and somewhat young for a minister, and while a former soldier, retired at the relatively junior rank of Major. His selection over a number of more senior politicians and retired officers created some bad blood between Conteh and others within the governing party, the APC. It remains to be seen if the letter results in some reforms or a witch hunt for the authors (or both), but regardless the general population does not yet share the disaffection noted by authors--but IS confident that military intervention is the last thing Sierra Leone needs to make things right.

PERRY